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SUBJECT: SANADER'S HDZ REACHING OUT EARLY TO IMPROVE
CROATIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE U.S.

CLASSIFIED BY: DCM PATRICK S. MOON FOR REASON 1.5 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) MIOMIR ZUZUL, CERTAIN TO BE HDZ'S NOMINEE AS CROATIA'S NEXT FOREIGN MINISTER, TOLD THE AMBASSADOR ON NOVEMBER 24 THAT THE HDZ IS SEEKING TO FORM A COALITION WITH THE CROATIAN PEASANTS' PARTY (HSS) AND THE ETHNIC SERB PARTY TO AVOID HAVING TO BRING THE EXTREME RIGHT-WING CROATIAN PARTY OF RIGHTS (HSP) INTO GOVERNMENT. AN HDZ GOVERNMENT WOULD BE PREPARED TO SIGN AN ARTICLE 98 AGREEMENT AND WOULD SUPPORT DEPLOYING CROATIAN TROOPS TO JOIN COALITION FORCES IN IRAQ. THE AMBASSADOR CONGRATULATED THE HDZ ON ITS WIN AND COMMENDED VOTERS' EXPRESSION OF SUPPORT FOR INTEGRATION INTO EURO-ATLANTIC INSTITUTIONS. HE PRAISED THE HDZ'S CAMPAIGN STATEMENTS ON MOVING FORWARD WITH WAR LEGACY ISSUES, INCLUDING ICTY. THE AMBASSADOR SAID THE U.S. WOULD MAKE JUDGMENTS BASED ON THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS, NOT ITS STATEMENTS. ZUZUL LOOKED FORWARD TO A SERIES OF REGULAR CONSULTATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) ON NOVEMBER 24, THE AMBASSADOR PHONED HDZ PRESIDENT IVO SANADER TO CONGRATULATE HIM FOR HIS PARTY'S STRONG SHOWING IN THE NOVEMBER 23 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. SANADER WAS QUICK TO RETURN THE CALL, AND ASKED THAT THE AMBASSADOR MEET RIGHT AWAY WITH MIOMIR ZUZUL, WHO WOULD BE THE HDZ'S NOMINEE AS CROATIA'S FOREIGN MINISTER. THE AMBASSADOR AGREED, AND MET WITH ZUZUL ONE-ON-ONE ON THE EVENING OF NOVEMBER 24.

3. (C) ZUZUL WAS CLEARLY PLEASED WITH THE HDZ'S RESULT, BUT WAS QUICK TO POINT OUT THAT THE HDZ IS STILL WORKING ON PUTTING TOGETHER A COALITION WITH ENOUGH VOTES TO SEAT A GOVERNMENT. HE TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT THE HDZ'S FIRST CHOICE IS TO GIVE THE HSS A CHANCE TO FORM A GOVERNMENT. THE HDZ WOULD BE WILLING TO MAKE A GENEROUS OFFER TO THE HSS, ZUZUL EXPLAINED, IN ORDER TO FORM A GOVERNMENT WITHOUT THE HSP. (NOTE: ZUZUL KNOWS WELL THAT THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WOULD BE HESITANT TO ENGAGE WITH THE NATIONALIST HSP. END NOTE.) DESPITE THE HSS' POOR SHOWING IN THE POLLS, THE HDZ WOULD BE WILLING TO OFFER HSS PRESIDENT TOMCIC THE CHANCE TO RETURN AS SPEAKER OF CROATIA'S PARLIAMENT (A POST HE HELD FOR THE DURATION OF THE RACAN GOVERNMENT). FAILING THAT, THE HDZ WILL OFFER TOMCIC A SPOT AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OR PERHAPS ONE OR MORE "NON-KEY" MINISTRIES IN THE NEXT GOVERNMENT.

4. (C) ZUZUL SAID THAT THE HDZ WOULD SEEK THE SUPPORT OF CROATIA'S ETHNIC SERB PARTY, WHICH, THANKS TO CROATIA'S PROGRESSIVE NEW CONSTITUTIONAL LAW ON NATIONAL MINORITIES, NOW HAS THREE SEATS IN THE PARLIAMENT. THE HDZ WOULD BE WILLING TO OFFER THE SDSS A POSITION AS DEPUTY SPEAKER, SAID ZUZUL, WHICH WOULD BE A STRONG SIGNAL OF THE SANADER GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION TO MOVE FORWARD ON REFUGEE ISSUES.

5. (C) ZUZUL SAID THAT RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. WILL BE A PRIORITY FOR THE SANADER GOVERNMENT. THE HDZ WOULD SUPPORT SIGNING AN ARTICLE 98 AGREEMENT AND WOULD MOVE FORWARD WITH DEPLOYING A CROATIAN CONTINGENT OF TROOPS TO JOIN COALITION FORCES IN IRAQ. ONCE THE COALITION IS LOCKED IN PLACE, BUT BEFORE THE FIRST MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT, SANADER PLANS TO TRAVEL TO ROME (WHERE HE WOULD SEEK A MEETING WITH PM BERLUSCONI AND AN AUDIENCE WITH THE POPE) AND ALSO TO WASHINGTON TO DESCRIBE HIS NEW GOVERNMENT'S PLANS. ZUZUL SAID SANADER WOULD HOPE FOR A MEETING IN WASHINGTON WITH NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER DR. RICE.

6. (C) THE AMBASSADOR THANKED ZUZUL FOR HIS OPENNESS AND HIS READINESS TO MEET WITH US ON A REGULAR BASIS; THE U.S. BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CROATIA HAS BECOME MUCH MORE BROAD IN THE NEARLY FOUR YEARS SINCE THE HDZ WAS LAST IN GOVERNMENT. THE AMBASSADOR CONGRATULATED THE HDZ ON ITS STRONG SHOWING IN THE POLLS AND POINTED OUT THAT ELECTION RESULTS SHOWED THAT VOTERS OVERWHELMINGLY BACKED PARTIES WHICH SUPPORT CROATIA'S INTEGRATION INTO EURO-ATLANTIC INSTITUTIONS. THE AMBASSADOR URGED THE HDZ TO CAPITALIZE ON ITS STRONG MANDATE AND MOVE FORWARD ON THE TOUGHEST ISSUES, LIKE ICTY COOPERATION AND REFUGEE RETURN, EARLY IN ITS TENURE. HE WELCOMED SANADER'S PROGRESSIVE STATEMENTS DURING THE CAMPAIGN, BUT WARNED THAT THE USG WOULD MAKE JUDGMENTS BASED ONLY ON POLICY IMPLEMENTATION.

17. (C) THE AMBASSADOR SUGGESTED IT WOULD BE EASIER TO
ADVOCATE FOR SENIOR-LEVEL MEETINGS IN WASHINGTON ONCE SANADER
HAD ACTUALLY TAKEN OFFICE AND HAD A POSITIVE TRACK RECORD.
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